

Subject: DEGREE ATTAINMENT PROGRAM

Date: July 10, 1993

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Replaces Policy Dated: N/A

PURPOSE: To establish a means by which Pinal County employees may work to attain educational degrees while maintaining employment with the County.

STATEMENT OF POLICY: The greatest assets of the Pinal County government are its employees. It is the policy of the County to encourage the personal and professional growth of its employees through higher education in work-related areas through attainment of undergraduate or graduate degrees.

SCOPE: Pinal County employees who have completed a minimum of twelve months of continuous full-time service, and who have completed a minimum of 60 semester hours of post-high school college-level course work with a minimum grade average of 3.0 or better, may apply for acceptance in a program designed to facilitate completion of an educational effort culminating in an undergraduate or graduate degree at an accredited college or university in a field which is directly related to their duties performed for Pinal County.

The Degree Attainment Program offers a choice of two options as follows:

Option A Attending a college or university while working:

The employees retain their current position while reducing work hours to not less than 70% of a normal workweek (not less than an annual average of 30 hours per week) to attend classes leading to a designated degree. The usual payroll deductions and County contributions are made to continue group insurance. The employee will continue to accrue vacation and sick leave at the normal full time rates on a per-hour-worked basis. Employees are paid only for time worked and approved leave taken. Exempt employees will be required to use their accrued vacation time for the periods of educational absence.

Option B Attending a college or university full-time:

The employees are retained as active County employees for a maximum of two years continuous time while attending college but do not receive any salary from the County. Medical benefits only may be continued for the employee by the employee reimbursing the County monthly for the full cost of premiums for the continued benefits.

Under either option A or B, the County will not pay for or reimburse any expense incurred by the employee in pursuit of the designated degree unless the employee has requested reimbursement through the County's Tuition Reimbursement Program (Policy #5.30) and such request has been approved.

PROCEDURES: To be considered for the Pinal County Degree Attainment Program an employee must submit an application in writing through their Elected Official, their Assistant County Manager, or Department Director (for those departments not reporting to an Assistant County Manager).

The application must state the employee's full name, current home address, date of employment with the County, class title, department, and work unit if applicable. The degree and major course of study must be indicated as well as the educational institution and the proposed time period. A detailed narrative explanation must be given as

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to how the proposed course of study and degree relate to the employee's duties for the County and what benefits may be expected to be gained by the County. This application must be affirmatively endorsed in writing by the employee's immediate supervisor and Assistant County Manager or Department Director (for those departments not reporting to an Assistant County Manager), or the Elected Official (for those individuals outside the County Manager's chain of command). Applications must be submitted to the County Manager at least two months prior to the start of the proposed program under either option.

An employee may remain in the degree attainment program for a maximum of two years. If a longer period is desired, the employee must re-apply at the end of the two-year period.

SELECTION: The County Manager will appoint a Degree Attainment Program Selection Committee consisting of Elected Officials and appointed staff to review and make recommendations for approval or disapproval of each application. The County Manager will approve or disapprove each application with the advice and consent of the Degree Attainment Program Selection Committee. No more than 10 employees may enter the degree attainment program in any fiscal year.

FILLING VACANCIES: The vacancy, if any, created by an acceptance into the Degree Attainment Program may be filled utilizing a temporary appointment with the cost of the employee's salary plus the full cost of the temporary/part-time replacement not to exceed the full cost (direct salary, benefits and taxes) of the salary being paid to the employee accepted into the program. Participation in this program must be cost-neutral to Pinal County.

GRADES: All employees entered into the program must maintain at least a "B" average, (3.0) at the end of each semester, in order to continue in the program. Final grades must be reported to the immediate supervisor and the County Manager no later than 15 days after the grades become available to the employee.

CONTRACT: Since the situation, course load, and study time will vary from employee to employee, each employee will sign a contract with the immediate supervisor, Assistant County Manager or Elected Official and the County Manager. The contract will delineate the terms and conditions of the employee's permissive entry into this program.

PERMISSIVE PROGRAM: Acceptance into this program is permissive, contingent upon the supervisors' recommendation for approval, the Degree Attainment Program Selection Committee's recommendation, approval by the County Manager and consent of the Board of Supervisors. Nothing in this policy may be construed as an employee right to enter into this program. The selection criteria will include (but are not limited to): The employee's past work history, the employee's past academic performance, the perceived future of the employee in Pinal County and the needs of Pinal County.